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Great Expectations
Democratic Ideals and Political Trust in European Democracies

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Abstract

While in the traditional literature, low or declining levels of political trust were often considered as a lack of support for democracy, more recently authors have also claimed that the presence of more critical citizens can be seen as a hallmark for a more mature and established democracy. In this paper we assess the empirical validity of both claims, by relying on the relative deprivation literature on the relation between expectation and frustration. If citizens apply ever increasing expectations with regard to the functioning of democracy, this could partly explain the observed frustration, even controlling for objective indicators for quality of government. The 2012 wave of the European Social Survey included an extensive battery with regard to democratic ideals, and using latent class analysis we can indeed identify a group with rather high expectations toward how a democracy would function. Multilevel regression analysis demonstrates that high democratic expectations are associated with lower levels of trust, even after including a full battery of individual and country level controls. The analysis also suggests that the state's capacity to reduce poverty might be a source of lower levels of political trust. We close with some observation on how rising democratic expectations could be a cause for the occurrence of a new group of 'critical citizens'.

Keywords: political trust, democracy, civic culture, European Social Survey, latent class analysis

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Introduction

Political trust is an elusive concept. It has been argued repeatedly that most often, citizens lack the available knowledge to ascertain whether politicians really are trustworthy (Hardin, 1999). There is more than anecdotal evidence to suggest that at least for some politicians questions could be raised with regard to professional integrity. Nevertheless, research has repeatedly shown that political trust can be an important resource for the stability of democratic political systems, as it expresses a high level of diffuse support for the system. Furthermore, we know that political trust is important as it ensures a stronger willingness with regard to law compliance (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). Nevertheless, authors working within the 'critical citizens' tradition have argued that the normative emphasis on political trust is to a large extent obsolete (Dalton & Welzel, 2015). Their argument is that while political trust was perhaps an essential component of the allegiant political culture as it was described in the seminal work of Almond and Verba (1963), it can hardly still be considered as a relevant topic for a new generation of 'assertive citizens'. These citizens are firmly attached to basic democratic values, but simultaneously they adopt a highly critical and vigilant outlook toward politicians and political institutions in general (Rosanvallon, 2006). In this literature, there are frequent references to the finding in the World Values Survey that the highest levels of political trust are recorded in authoritarian regimes like China or Vietnam (Dalton & Shin, 2015). The underlying suggestion is clear: political trust is seen as a characteristic of citizens who do not have any other means available to hold politicians accountable for what they are doing. In an authoritarian political regime, there are not many other options than to 'trust' one's political leaders. In mature democracies, assertive citizens no longer need to rely on political trust.

In this paper, we present a test for this 'assertive citizen' argument: while in the older literature, political distrust was often interpreted as an indicator for political alienation, authors like Norris (1999) have on the contrary argued that distrust could be an indicator for a healthy and thriving democracy. If this argument is correct, we should be able to observe that those who expect most from democracy, and have the highest level of democratic expectations, in practice are often disappointed if politicians do not manage to live up to these high expectations. Following the alienation argument, on the other hand, would lead to the assumption that distrust would be highest among the group that does not feel connected at all to the democratic norms and institutions. Self-evidently, it is always difficult to measure in a comprehensive manner what citizens actually expect from democracy, as normative

discussions about this topic do not always resonate with concepts that are alive within public opinion (Bengtsson & Christensen, forthcoming; Flanagan et al., 2005). The 2012 wave of the European Social Survey, however, included an extensive battery on what are important features of democracy for respondents. This new battery allows us to investigate in a comprehensive manner what kind of democratic ideals European citizens adhere to, and what is important to them in order to have a full democracy. In this paper, these ideals will be used to investigate levels of political trust among the respondents in the European Social Survey.

What do Citizens Expect from Democracy?

In most of the literature, political trust is seen as an important form of diffuse support for democratic political systems (Easton, 1975). If citizens trust the main institutions of the political system, this implies that on average they consider the function of the political system to be legitimate and democratic. Within this framework, political trust can only be considered as a positive phenomenon that is essential for democratic stability (Zmerli & Hooghe, 2011). Theoretically, political trust is a crucial component of the allegiant political culture that is so crucial in the work of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. In a number of established democracies, most notably in the United States, a downward trend with regard to political trust has been identified (Pharr & Putnam, 2000), and within this theoretical framework this can be only be seen as a problematic phenomenon. If citizens lose trust in the basic institutions of democracy, this can only endanger the stability of the system (Bovens & Wille, 2011).

An alternative interpretation for this phenomenon is presented in the work on 'critical citizens' (Norris, 1999). In this line of the literature, it is stated that citizens are increasingly critical toward the functioning of the political system, but that this should not be seen as a reason for concern. On the contrary, the presence of more critical citizens is seen as an indicator for the maturity of democratic political system (Denk, Christensen & Bergh, forthcoming). While this line of reasoning has been highly influential in the literature, a clear causal reasoning to support this bold claim is still missing. This lack of a causal mechanism is rather problematic, as two elements speak against the 'critical citizens' argument. First, on an individual level, there is a strong positive correlation between education level and political trust (Hooghe, Dassonneville & Marien, 2015). As average education levels continue to increase in most of Europe, one would therefore expect that levels of political trust would

increase in the same manner. Increased education levels would normally be associated with higher levels of political sophistication, and therefore also with higher levels of political trust. In almost all of the research, there is a positive correlation between level of education and political trust, and it remains a challenge therefore to explain why political trust would decline in an era when average education levels are still rising after the rapid expansion of the education system in the second half of the 20th century. A second problem is that political trust is often considered to be a form of evaluation of the actual performance of the political system (Seyd, forthcoming). The reasoning is that if citizens are confronted with a sub-standard performance of institutions, they will be inclined to lose trust in the political system altogether (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008; De Vroome, Hooghe & Marien, 2013). There is no reason at all, however, to assume that the quality of democratic governance would have declined in Europe, and to some extent even the contrary is true (Rothstein, 2011). Therefore, the assumption should be that levels of political trust would be actually rising in contemporary democracies. These structural trends, therefore, both would predict increasing levels of trust in political institutions, while in reality, there are empirical indications for stability or even decline.

An element that is often neglected in this literature, however, is that evaluations not only reflect perceptions of actual functioning, but are also based on pre-existing expectations (Seyd, forthcoming). The literature on relative deprivation suggests that deprivation might not just be the result of negative evaluations, but also of rising expectations (Gurr, 1970; Abeles, 1976). Within this line of the literature, the main argument is that there is no absolute norm to assess how satisfied or dissatisfied citizens are with the state of public affairs. If expectations are low, citizens will be quite satisfied with what could be seen as a very low quality level of services. Rising expectations, on the other hand, will lead to frustration and dissatisfaction, if the quality of services does not rise as strongly as the expectations do. In this view, the rise of the civil rights movement in the United States is not a result of the fact that racial discrimination became worse in the 1950s. Rather, rising expectations meant that the Afro-American population of the US no longer took for granted engrained traditions of racial discrimination (McAdam, 1982). To put it differently: feelings of deprivation or frustration should not just be seen as a reaction to objective conditions, but they arise out of the distance between expectations and experiences. Taking this argument about *relative deprivation* seriously implies that the alleged decline of political trust should not just be seen as a reaction to the (perceived) lack of quality of government in liberal democracies, but should also be

related to pre-existing expectations. If the quality of government remains constant, but if expectations are rising, this will result in an increasing sentiment of deprivation. If we want to explain trends in political trust, the literature on relative deprivation implies that we also have to take into account the expectations citizens have toward the political system (Smith et al., 2012). Our argument, therefore, is that expectations with regard to democracy should be included in the research on satisfaction with democracy. Satisfaction with democracy does not only reflect the perceived quality of governance; rather it also reflects the distance between expectations about democracy and evaluations of the political system. Expectations about democracy, therefore, should be taken into account when investigating levels of political trust in Europe.

Data and Methods: Investigating Democratic ideals

The European Social Survey in 2012 provides a unique opportunity to investigate cross-nationally citizens' expectations with regard to the ideal of democracy. In an extended battery of questions, respondents were presented a variety of aspects of democracy, and were asked to give a score for the importance of each item ("How important do you think it is for democracy in general that…"). The items included in this battery cover diverse aspects of democratic functioning ranging from free and fair elections and the protection of minority rights to protecting citizens against poverty.

When we review the mean values of the items in this battery, a first striking finding is that respondents tend to consider almost all elements as very important (Table 1). The rule of law (expressed by the item: "The courts treat everyone the same"), however, is clearly considered as the most important hallmark of a democratic political system with a score of 9.22 on the 0 to 10 scale. Exactly 800 years after this principle was established within the Magna Carta, it is clear that for the population of Europe, this democratic standard has become self-evident and almost sacrosanct status. Free and fair elections obtain an almost equally high score (8.96). It is quite striking to note, however, that protecting citizens from poverty, also receives a very high score (8.68), indicating that poverty protection is also seen as an important responsibility for a democratic political system. Reducing income differences receives a lower priority, which may indicate that citizens are more likely to view poverty protection as an important democratic ideal when it is defined as an objective concept rather than as a relative concept. Despite the fact that poverty research often stresses that the concept of poverty should be

investigated against the backdrop of living standards within society, among public opinion there is stronger support for reducing poverty in absolute terms than there is for reducing relative inequality within society. Finally the lowest average score is found for the item that political parties should offer clear alternatives with regard to policy orientations. If we want to determine how these democratic ideals have an impact on political trust, it is important, however, not to limit ourselves to the average scores on these items, but rather to try to understand the internal structure of these normative concepts.

Table 1. Scores on 'democratic ideals' battery

Description	Abbreviation	Var. name	Mean
The courts treat everyone the same	courts fair	cttresa	9.22
National elections are free and fair	fair elec.	fairelc	8.96
The government explains its decisions to voters	govt expl.	gvexpdc	8.85
The media provide citizens with reliable information to judge the govt.	media info.	meprinf	8.75
The government protects all citizens against poverty	poverty	gvctzpv	8.68
Governing parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job	party acc.	gptpelc	8.39
The rights of minority groups are protected	minority	rghmgpr	8.34
Opposition parties are free to criticise the government	opposition	oppcrgv	8.31
The media are free to criticise the government	free media	medcrgv	8.26
The government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels	income eq.	grdfinc	8.24
Different political parties offer clear alternatives to one another	party alter.	dfprtal	7.99

Notes: European Social Survey, 2012 (n=54,673). Prefatory survey question: "Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general that…". Responses coded on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 indicates "not at all important" and 10 indicates "extremely important".

In order to identify whether citizens hold distinctive democratic ideals in terms of the elements of democracy they consider most important, we performed a latent class analysis (LCA) that allows us to identify groups of respondents that are characterized by a similar combination of items in this battery. The main advantage of LCA is that it allows for the identification of latent structures that are not based on the separate items, but rather on how individuals responding in the survey combine those items in distinctive patterns. Therefore we can identify distinct groups of respondents who emphasize different combinations of items as priorities with regard to what is important for a democracy. In other words, the LCA allows us to identify groups of people who have distinctly different conceptions of what an ideal democracy looks like. In contrast to more established cluster analysis, LCA allows the researcher to determine the optimal number of clusters to be distinguished based on objective goodness of fit criteria, while for cluster analysis this often amounts to a rather arbitrary decision.

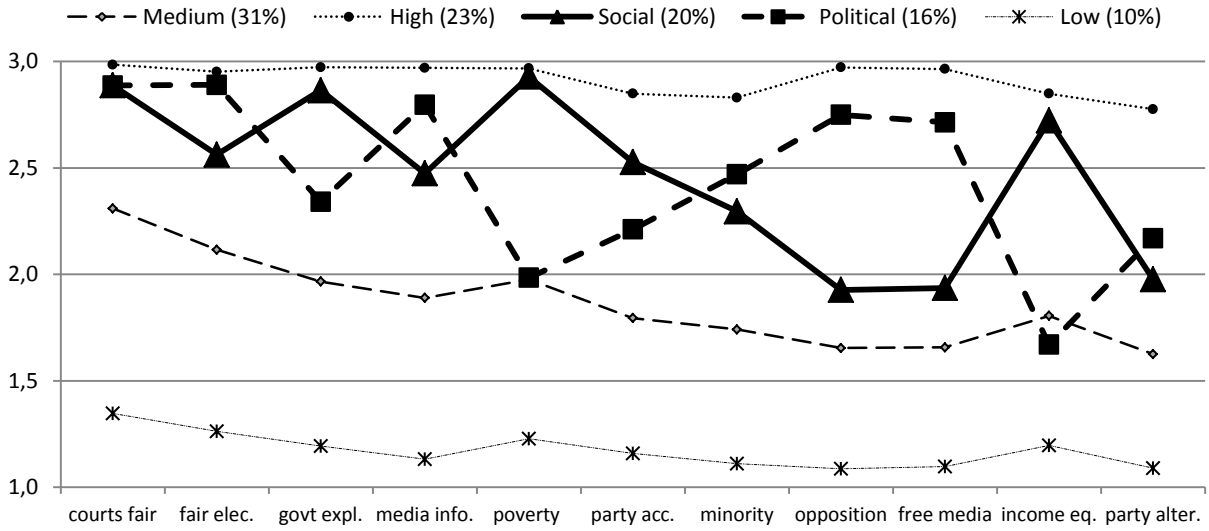
More specifically for this case, the analysis shows that five distinct groups of respondents should be identified (see Appendix for documentation of model selection). Since LCA is an actor-centered analytical approach, it allows us to identify respondents who emphasize specific items among the 11-indicator battery in terms of what they consider to be most important for democracy. This approach is therefore preferable for answering our research questions in comparison to the more familiar technique of factor analysis, which identifies latent dimensions of the variables without identifying overall patterns and typologies of individual responses.

The LCA findings point to distinctive democratic ideals held by five different groups of citizens. First, the latent class labeled "high ideals", which includes 23% of the respondents, identifies a group of citizens who deemed all of the elements of democracy investigated in the survey to be highly important. This group of respondents gives the maximum score to almost all of the items, without any further distinctions. Conversely, the group labeled "low ideals", which includes 10% of the respondents, attributed relatively low importance to all of the democracy indicators. An additional group labelled "medium ideals" (31% of the population) consistently attributed moderate importance to all indicators. These findings show that almost two-thirds of the respondents (64%) do not attribute special importance to specific elements of democracy, but rather give all of them the same priority.

The two additional latent classes identify individuals who have two contrasting normative conceptions of what is important for democracy. The democratic ideal labeled as "social rights" that is held by 20% of the respondents places relatively high importance on democratic values of economic equality (the reduction of income inequality and protection from poverty) and governmental accountability (government explaining its decisions and held accountable in elections). Simultaneously, however, this group does not pay all that much attention to the presence of free media. In contrast, the ideal labeled "political rights" that is held by 16% of the respondents place its relative emphasis on the importance of a free and competitive electoral process, free media, and the protection of minority rights. This group, on the other hand, scores low on the priority given to the objective of poverty reduction. The results of the analysis, therefore clearly show that, despite the fact that all items seem to receive rather high scores, we can indeed empirically distinguish five groups that hold different opinions on what is considered to be important in democracy. This allows for sufficient variation, to use these

concepts of democracy as our independent variable in the analysis. Since in Figure 1 the democracy indicators are ordered on the x-axis from highest to lowest means in the general population, the contrasting emphases of these democratic ideals is visually clear in the crossing of the connective lines.

Figure 1. Democratic ideals held by five groups of citizens



Source: European Social Survey, 2012 (n=54,673).
Notes: Latent class analysis conditional probabilities for optimal partial equivalence model that includes country covariate and applies design weight for all cases[1]. The y-axis plots the conditional probabilities that members of a latent class will consider the indicators on the x-axis to be important aspects of democracy. Indicators on the x-axis are organized from left to right by decreasing means in the pooled dataset. Findings based on 3-point coding of the original 11-category democratic ideal items: 0-7 recoded as 1; 8-9 recoded as 2; 10 recoded as 3.[2] See the appendix for further documentation of model choice and measurement equivalence tests.

The analysis suggest that this five group solution for the democratic ideals scale is cross-culturally equivalent, implying that these distinctions hold well in the countries that have participated in the European Social Survey. We can observe, however, strong differences between countries with regard to the prevalence of these ideals. The group having very high expectations with regard to democracy is highest in recent democracies like Kosovo or Albania. It is rather low, however, in very established democracies like Belgium, the Netherlands and Finland. Social rights tend to be emphasized in Slovenia and Albania, while the political rights are strongest in Denmark, Iceland and Sweden. Since there obviously are clear differences between countries, this implies that this battery can also be used to investigate differences across societies.

T**able 2. Distribution of democratic ideals across countries**

	High ideals	Medium ideals	Low ideals	Social rights	Political rights
Albania	0.45	0.15	0.01	0.31	0.08
Belgium	0.13	0.39	0.13	0.19	0.16
Bulgaria	0.39	0.18	0.04	0.20	0.18
Switzerland	0.13	0.39	0.07	0.19	0.22
Cyprus	0.39	0.26	0.02	0.19	0.14
Czech Republic	0.18	0.29	0.17	0.19	0.18
Germany	0.17	0.30	0.05	0.20	0.28
Denmark	0.16	0.33	0.03	0.17	0.31
Estonia	0.27	0.29	0.11	0.17	0.15
Spain	0.32	0.26	0.07	0.28	0.08
Finland	0.12	0.41	0.10	0.19	0.17
France	0.18	0.38	0.09	0.20	0.14
United Kingdom	0.19	0.35	0.13	0.20	0.13
Hungary	0.38	0.22	0.13	0.16	0.12
Ireland	0.21	0.35	0.17	0.15	0.12
Israel	0.22	0.34	0.06	0.21	0.17
Iceland	0.23	0.28	0.04	0.15	0.29
Italy	0.26	0.30	0.05	0.29	0.12
Lithuania	0.22	0.31	0.19	0.17	0.11
Netherlands	0.10	0.43	0.15	0.13	0.19
Norway	0.17	0.34	0.04	0.17	0.27
Poland	0.27	0.26	0.04	0.26	0.17
Portugal	0.31	0.26	0.22	0.17	0.05
Russian Federation	0.26	0.24	0.15	0.21	0.13
Sweden	0.23	0.27	0.04	0.14	0.32
Slovenia	0.21	0.30	0.05	0.32	0.12
Slovakia	0.16	0.36	0.20	0.16	0.12
Ukraine	0.31	0.27	0.07	0.23	0.12
Kosovo	0.37	0.24	0.11	0.22	0.06
TOTAL	**0.23**	**0.31**	**0.10**	**0.20**	**0.16**

Distribution of groups, identified in the latent class analysis, over participating countries in ESS2012.

We opted for a latent class analysis, because this way of approaching the data allows us to identify specific groups of citizens that make unique combinations with regard to the priority they attach to democratic ideals. By constructing these latent classes, we can address our research question whether there is indeed a distinct group of critical or assertive citizens, and subsequently whether this group indeed has low levels of political trust. A counter-argument could of course be that straightforward methods of analysis should always be preferred, and in this case a factor analysis would be a relatively easy way to reduce the complexity of this

democratic ideals scale. For the sake of the argument, we have indeed conducted such a factor analysis. It has to be stressed that these are two fundamentally different approaches: while the latent class analysis is meant to investigate groups of respondents, factor analysis is an item-based method of analysis. A review of the factor analysis findings for the same data clarifies the advantage of the LCA findings for addressing our research questions. Factor analysis shows that the items load on two main factors that roughly correspond to the "social rights" and "political rights" emphases identified in the LCA, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Factor analysis of the 'democratic ideals' battery

	Factor 1: Political	Factor 2: Social
Opposition parties are free to criticise the government	**0.8306**	0.1208
The media are free to criticise the government	0.7966	0.1195
The media provide citizens with reliable information	0.7263	0.3247
National elections are free and fair	0.7029	0.2741
Different political parties offer clear alternatives	0.6191	0.2595
The rights of minority groups are protected	0.5865	0.3305
The courts treat everyone the same	0.5257	0.5122
The government explains its decisions to voters	0.3804	0.7254
Governing parties can be punished in elections	0.3643	0.5634
The government protects all citizens against poverty	0.1687	**0.8566**
The government reduces differences in income levels	0.0544	0.8225

Notes: Results of a principle-component factor analysis, varimax rotation; loadings reported for the factors with an eigenvalue above 1.0.

One might conclude from the factor analysis findings that the concepts of social and political citizenship are separate dimensions that are disconnected from each other according to citizens' perspectives. The LCA findings help us understand the factor analysis results with greater precision: the vast majority of citizens consider both political and social elements of democracy to be equally important, while two specific subgroups of citizens emphasize one set of values over the other. The Latent Class Analysis therefore does not just allow us to differentiate between social and political rights, but also the level of democratic ideals, held by respondents. Building upon the latent class analysis identification of specific individual-conceptions of ideal democracy, we can now proceed to investigate how different conceptions

of ideal democracy impact upon citizens' evaluation of and satisfaction with democracy in their countries.

The Relation with Political Trust

After having defined groups of citizens with distinct democratic ideals, we can now move on to address our main research question: how are these ideals related to political trust? The European Social Survey included a battery of institutions, where respondents were invited to indicate their level of trust in each of these institutions. Given our focus on national political systems, we included the five national political institutions in our analysis: Parliament, the legal system, police, political parties and politicians. The trust score on these five items was added in a sum scale to arrive at a political trust scale.[3] The United Nations, and the European Parliament were thus not included in this scale, as these do not refer to the national political context. A first overview of the means scores on the political trust scale already suggests that there are indeed marked differences across groups ($F=390.76$, $p<0.001$). The highest trust score can be found among the respondents that were attributed to the political rights class. Those who claim that a democracy should focus most strongly on protecting political rights, therefore, also seem to have the highest trust levels. The mean scores suggest that we find the lowest level of political trust among the respondents that consider all aspects of democracy to be highly important. This first analysis, therefore, seems to suggest that holding very high expectations toward democracy in general, indeed might be associated with having low levels of trust in the political institutions.

Table 4. Political trust means of groups

	Mean	**S.D**
Political rights group	4.796	2.215
Medium ideals group	4.460	2.072
Low ideals group	4.061	1.914
Social rights group	3.979	2.229
High ideals group	3.694	2.360
All respondents	4.164	2.231

Following this first exploration of the data, we can now move on to a full multivariate and multilevel analysis to explain levels of political trust. First, we include of course the five groups of democratic ideals that we have identified, with an assignment to the specific groups as our first and main independent variable. The 'low ideals' groups here serves as the reference category. Furthermore, we include control variables that are routinely included in the models on critical citizenship in contemporary democracies (Dalton & Welzel, 2015). Most of the research hints at the fact that higher education levels are associated with higher levels of political trust, while trust levels also tend to be higher among older age groups. We also control for the self-placement on an ideological left-right scale, as in general right-wing voters tend to have higher levels of political trust (Hooghe, Marien & De Vroome, 2012).

At the country level, it first has to be noted that the number of observations is rather limited, so few country level variables that we have available will be introduced one by one in the analysis (Table 5). A first control variable is the GDP/capita, as it can be assumed that trust is higher in more affluent societies (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014). In recent years, various scholars have defended the claim that objective and reliable measurements for the quality of government are available (Rothstein, 2011; Charron & Lapuente, 2013). If political trust is in some way related to the quality of government, we should observe a positive relation between the two indicators. Here we take the Good Governance indicator, as it was developed by the World Bank. We also introduce a difference between well-established and newer democracies (based on the Polity IV dataset). As established democracy, we consider those countries that during the past thirty years obtained a score of 8 or higher. In addition, we also control for countries that are not democratic or have only started to perform democratic within the past ten years (score of 8 or higher) and labeled then "weak democracies" (i.e. Albania, Kosovo, Russia and Ukraine). Given the fact that our dependent variable is continuous, we use a Multilevel OLS regression.

In a first model (Table 5) we include only the individual level variables, and results are striking. The group with high democratic ideals indeed has significantly lower levels of political trust, and the effect is even quite substantial. Those stressing social rights also are characterized by lower levels of political trust, while we find the opposite effects for respondents stressing political rights. The control variables partly confirm expectations. We can observe a strong education effect, with the highest trust levels among the group with the highest educational degree. Those who identify themselves on the right side of the political spectrum, also have significantly higher trust levels, but rather in contrast to our expectations, we do see a negative relation with age. In Model II (Table 5) we first introduce GDP per capita as control variable on the country level. The effect is positive and significant, indicating that political trust levels are indeed higher in richer societies. Including this variable in the model, however, does not change the individual level effects. The evolution in GDP per capita does not have an effect, but we do find a strong positive relation with good governance indicators and the presence of stable democracy. This confirms the notion that there is at least some relation between political trust and good governance, although the direction of causality can be disputed. It can be noted, however, that in this case too, the effect of the individual level variables do not change at all, so that our results with regard to the relation between democratic ideals and political trust do not seem to be affected at all by different country level indicators. Finally (Model V), it can be confirmed that political trust levels are significantly lower in weaker democracies, but here too, the main conclusion is that this does not have an effect at all on the individual level relations. In all models, it is obvious that the lowest trust levels can be seen among the group with high expectations about how a democracy should function.

Table 5. Explaining Political Trust

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Democratic Ideals (ref: low)					
Medium ideals	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)
High ideals	-0.223***	-0.222***	-0.222***	-0.223***	-0.222***
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Political rights	0.164***	0.164***	0.164***	0.164***	0.164***
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Social rights	-0.108**	-0.108**	-0.108**	-0.108**	-0.108**
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Age	-0.043***	-0.043***	-0.043***	-0.043***	-0.043***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age^2	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Sex (1=female)	-0.037*	-0.037*	-0.037*	-0.037*	-0.037*
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Education (ref:low)					
Mid	0.087***	0.087***	0.087***	0.088***	0.087***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
High	0.439***	0.439***	0.440***	0.440***	0.439***
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Left-right	0.077***	0.077***	0.077***	0.077***	0.077***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
GDP/ cap (1000USD)		0.075***			
		(0.008)			
Good governance (index)			0.046***		
			(0.006)		
Established democracy				1.522***	
				(0.314)	
'Weak' democracy					-1.576**
					(0.528)
Constant	4.608***	2.227***	1.104*	3.716***	4.826***
	(0.219)	(0.291)	(0.492)	(0.250)	(0.207)
ICC	0.2750	0.08926	0.1153	0.1730	0.2248

Note: Entries are results of a Multilevel OLS regression. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. *Source:* ESS2012 N=49,127 within 29 countries. Baseline model intraclass-correlation: 0.28. N=43,277.

Discussion

In most of the literature, there is an obvious concern about trends with regard to levels of political trust in established democracies. Although the available literature does not document clear downward trends, it can be noted that in some countries there is concern about an alleged decline of legitimacy. The debate however concentrates on the normative implications of this finding. Dalton and Shin (2015, 106) note quite optimistically: "In most highly consolidated democracies, confidence in central democratic institutions has been falling in recent decades. Political criticism is the spirit of the contemporary age." The goal of the current paper is to investigate whether this optimistic point of view can be substantiated by the results of empirical research.

A first conclusion is that many of the classic findings still hold in the current age. Levels of political trust are significantly higher among highly educated citizens, and in stable democracies with well-functioning political institutions. If we limit ourselves to the European context, it is clear that political trust still is associated with the indicator we usually expect, like good governance. While it might be correct that this relation is no longer valid if we use global datasets like the World Values Survey, it has to be noted that for Europe at least political trust still can function as an indicator for a stable and performant democracy. The idea that political trust has become completely obsolete, and that highly educated and assertive citizens are first of all distrusting, therefore is not supported by the results of our analysis. For the European context, the old idea that better governance will be associated with higher levels of political trust, is still supported, and we do find systematically lower levels of political trust in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that are characterized by lower scores on the Good Governance Index.

At the same time, our findings allow us to qualify some of the misgivings about low levels of political trust. We find lower levels of political trust among citizens who have very high ideals about how a democratic society should look like, and this points to an important lacuna in the literature on trust. Routinely, political trust is portrayed as a response to the functioning of the political system, or as a reaction to specific experiences with members of these institutions. The relation, however, is more complex, as the evaluation is also based on pre-existing expectations about how a democracy should look like. It has to be remembered in this regard that frustration only occurs when experiences remain below the level of expectations.

If expectations are low to start with, they can hardly be frustrated by subsequent experiences. The fact that political trust levels are lowest among the group that expects most from democratic governance, is a clear indicator for the fact that this line of reasoning should not be neglected. Rather in contrast to what the traditional 'civic culture' literature assumed: we do not find this effect among the politically alienated, but most specifically among the respondents that really are most involved, and have the highest expectations about democracy. This also allows us to solve an apparent puzzle: Klingemann (2015) rather directly assumes that assertive citizens will also be 'dissatisfied democrats'. As long as we see political trust as purely the result of some kind of evaluation process, there is no apparent logic in this claim. Even highly critical citizens could be satisfied, if they live in a country that receives high scores on the good governance indicators, as is the case in the Scandinavian countries or in Canada. If citizens in these countries would make an objective assessment, they should have rather high levels of political trust. The current analysis, however, reminds us about the fact that evaluations are always based on a standard or on an expectation pattern. Those who have very high standards with regard to the way how democracy should function, almost inevitably will meet some disappointment with as a result lower levels of political trust. This solves, to a large extent, the Klingemann puzzle: critical citizens do become dissatisfied democrats for the simple reason that their expectations are so high.

It is equally important, however, to distinguish between the kind of expectations: while an emphasis on social rights was negatively related to political trust, the opposite was true for an emphasis on political rights. Especially a disappointment about the incapacity of the state apparatus to combat poverty, apparently is linked to this negative assessment. This is a highly relevant finding given the current trend toward a retrenchment of the welfare state in many European countries. To the extent that these policies lead to increasing poverty and exclusion, it can be expected that this will lead to lower levels of political trust, especially among those citizens who consider it as essential duty for a democratic political system to reduce poverty in society (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015).

It is highly relevant for future discussions on trends in political trust to also take into account the expectations citizens have toward democracy. This, however, further complicates the debate. Levels of political trust should not just be seen as a form of evaluation of the function of the political system: the norms that are used to make this assessment are equally important. As has been noted: the 'democratic ideals' battery in ESS 2012 was unique, so we do not

know anything about time trends with regard to these expectations. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that expectations of democracy have become higher as a result of higher average education levels. The 'critical citizens' literature would also lead to the assumption that expectations with regard to democracy would have become higher in recent decades due to general shifts in norms, as citizens now stress more strongly the importance of self-expressive values and general principles of freedom. This would imply, however, that political systems are confronted with an uphill struggle, as they have to address an ever expanding set of expectations from their citizens. Whether or not it is actually possible for political system to live up to these ever higher democratic expectations, however, is a question that cannot be solved given the data at hand.

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Appendix

A1. Latent class model choice

Table A1 displays the goodness of fit statistics for selecting the optimal number of latent classes, and for testing for measurement equivalence across countries. The BIC is the most widely used statistic for assessing goodness of fit, and a smaller BIC indicates better model fit. A complementary approach is to evaluate the percent change in the likelihood chi-squared statistic L^2 in comparison to the one-class model (Magidson & Vermunt 2004: 176-177). Even though the absolute value of the BIC continues to decrease through the 6-class model, the percent reduction of the L^2 is minimal in the 6-class model. Adding a sixth class essentially splits the "low-expectations" class into two groups, one that has somewhat higher expectations than the other. Based on these considerations, we selected the five-class model.

Table A1. Latent class analysis model fit statistics for democratic ideals

Selecting optimal number of latent classes	BIC(LL)	CAIC(LL)	L^2	Change L^2	Class.Err.
1-Class	1194720	1194742	414310		0.00
2-Class	1020489	1020523	239949	-0.42	0.04
3-Class	973207	973253	192535	-0.54	0.06
4-Class	955536	955594	174733	-0.58	0.08
5-Class	**936685**	**936755**	**155751**	**-0.62**	**0.10**
6-Class	929586	929668	148521	-0.64	0.12

Notes: European Social Survey, 2012 (n=54,673). BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; LL = log likelihood; L^2=likelihood ratio chi-square statistics. Entries are test statistics for latent class models identifying one and more clusters of respondents, based on 11 indicators of democratic ideals with 'country' as a covariate, missings imputed, and design weights applied. Optimal model highlighted in bold font.

A2. Latent class measurement equivalence tests

In order to determine the viability of the latent classes as variables in subsequent cross-national analyses, it is necessary to test for whether the latent classes identified in the optimal model are equivalent across the countries in the data (Kankaraš, Moors & Vermunt, 2010; Kankaraš & Vermunt, 2014). Table A2 includes the fit statistics of tests for two kinds of measurement equivalence:

(1) **Partial equivalence** means that the same latent construct (in this study, the five democratic ideals identified by the latent class groups) is valid across all of the groups under investigation (in this study, the 29 countries included in the study). The test of partial equivalence investigates whether there is equality of the slope parameters, and can be understood as parallel to the test for metric equivalence in factor analysis.

(2) **Homogeneous equivalence** means that the scales of the latent construct have the same origin, in addition to the same slope parameters (as indicated in partial equivalence). Homogeneous equivalence can be understood as parallel to the test for scalar equivalence in factor analysis.

The equivalence tests in Table A2 show that the partial equivalence model has the lowest BIC and is the optimal model. The subsequent models remove direct effects for single indicators to test whether full equivalence is found for specific indicators, testing first for indicators with the lowest bivariate residuals. The increased BIC in the models that selectively remove direct effects for single indicators shows that no indicators are fully homogeneous across countries, and therefore the partial equivalence model with direct effects (i.e. that allows the intercepts for each item to vary across countries) is the optimal model. Therefore, five-class partial equivalence model is comparable across countries, and can therefore be used as data for next-step cross-national analyses.

Table A2. Latent class analysis measurement equivalence tests

Measurement equivalence test, 5-class model	BIC(LL)	CAIC(LL)	L^2	Change L^2	Class.Err.
Homogeneous model	929450	929632	326900		0.10
Heterogeneous model	917778	919808	295067	-0.10	0.10
Partial equivalence	**913246**	**914044**	**303976**	**-0.07**	**0.11**
Partial equivalence, 1 direct effect removed (meprinf)	913905	914647	305245	-0.07	0.10
Partial equivalence, 1 direct effect removed (oppcrgv)	913885	914627	305225	-0.07	0.10

Notes: European Social Survey, 2012 (n=54,673). BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; LL = log likelihood; L^2=likelihood ratio chi-square statistics. Entries are test statistics for latent class measurement equivalence tests across countries for the 5-class model, based on 11 indicators of democratic ideals with 'country' as a covariate, missings imputed, and design weights applied. Optimal model highlighted in bold font.

Endnotes

[1] . The reported model includes all case in the data, including those with missing data on the battery of questions regarding democratic ideals. The proportion of missing data on these indicators is low, ranging from 2-4% on each of the democratic ideals indicators, and the proportion of missing values on these indicators are evenly distributed throughout the countries in the study. We conducted two alternate analyses to test whether the findings would be affected by restricting the analyses to cases with missing data on the democratic ideals battery: (a) Conducting a listwise deletion of all cases that are missing data on any of the 11 democracy indicators, thereby analyzing the remaining 89.27% of the research population (b) Retaining cases that have missing data on only one indicator in the democratic ideals battery, thereby analyzing 94.61% of the research population (and excluding the 5.34% of cases that have missing data on 2 or more democratic ideals items). Analyses based on these alternate codings of missing data yielded the same substantive findings as those reported in the article (available from the authors).

[2] The advantage of recoding the original 11-category items into more parsimonious categories for the latent class analysis of these data is to avoid the problem of sparse data in analyzing categorical variables (Agresti, 2007). As evident in the presentation of the indicator means in Table 1, the variables in this battery are highly skewed toward the high end of the 11-point scale, so use of the original 11-category items creates a computational problem of sparse data. Relatedly, the more parsimonious coding enables the computationally intensive task of performing a definitive test of measurement equivalence across countries. In addition to the 3-point recode findings reported in this article, we also performed robustness tests to investigate whether the findings were affected by using alternate codings, including: the original 11-cateory response items; dichotomous cutoffs at 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, as well as the mean or median of each variable; an alternate 3-point coding (0-8=1, 9=2, 10=3) and a 4-point coding (0-7=1, 8=2, 9=3, 10=4). These tests all yielded similar substantive results as those reported in the article.

[3]. It would be more correct to label this as a scale on 'trust in political institutions'. In line with the literature, and for the sake of clarity, however, we will abbreviate this to 'political trust' (Marien, 2011).